

The Standard Bearer

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What to do about worry

Rev. Michael DeVries

Why such evils in the United States?

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All things come alike to all (Eccles. 9:1-3)

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Why?

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Psalter revision: Governing principles (6) music

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Meditation

Rev. Michael DeVries, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan

What to do about worry

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:6, 7

Our lives today are frequently so busy and so complex that we easily forget our dependence upon God. We are inclined to look to ourselves to solve our problems. In foolish pride we are inclined to look to our own resources and our own ingenuity to provide for our needs. But this self-centered, self-reliant attitude takes its toll. We find ourselves beset with worry and anxious cares. Even as we live in modern, prosperous times there is much occasion for worry. Worries about health, our own or that of our loved ones; worries about money, financial cares; worries about our children or about our aging parents—there are a host of anxious cares that can weigh heavily upon us.

Worry can be overwhelming, virtually paralyzing at times. Many seek counseling. Many gulp tranquilizers. Many attempt to drown their worries in drink. Others try to escape them by submerging themselves in the lusts and pleasures of this world.

And yet in the midst of all of this the Word of God comes to us, “Be careful for nothing!” Literally we read, “Be anxious in nothing,” or in other words, “Don’t worry!”

A serious problem

We hear so much about worry, anxiety, stress, and burn-out in our day. We know what worry is. We know by experience. Certainly, some are by their character more inclined to worry than others. But to one extent or another we all know what worry is. We know it the hard way. Worry is often our second nature. Who has not experienced that distress, that agony of mind and soul? The morbid dread that all in the future will not go as we think it should or as we would like to have it go? How many different things trouble us, vex our spirits, and cause us anxiety?

Realistically, we certainly have to conclude that

there seems to be abundant reason for worry. In spite of startling advancements and accomplishments in technology, in medicine, and on almost every front, the world is filled with dread and the prophets of gloom are many. International tensions have not abated. Wars, conflicts, and civil strife rage in many places. Terrorist attacks occur around the globe. Poverty and disease are rampant in many places.

Closer to home, there is occasion for anxiety and worry. Our own nation is beset with many problems. Divisions run deep—politically, economically, racially. Are we not shocked by abounding lawlessness and immorality? It is very easy to worry about the church in these evil days. We live in times of terrible apostasy. We see less and less tolerance for biblical principles and convictions. How much longer will we have freedom to worship? How much longer will we be permitted to rear and educate our children in the fear of the Lord? We see increasing persecution in many places.

And if all of that is not enough, there is the host of cares in our everyday lives to which we referred earlier—financial worries, health concerns, job security, family matters. They press upon us from every side. The constant pressures of daily living sometimes force us down into a pit of despair. We experience heavy burdens in this valley of tears. We are reminded that this life is nothing but a continual death.

Then we hear this Word of God, “Be careful for nothing.” Be full of care in nothing! Don’t worry! How apparently impossible! We might be inclined to think that the apostle Paul wrote these words at a time when he had no troubles at all, when he was extraordinarily free from care. But quite the opposite is true. For these words were penned from the prison in Rome while the threat of death hung over him. If anyone had reason to worry it was Paul! But the inspired apostle speaks from his own experience, assuring us that it is our calling not to worry.

It is a striking fact that almost all of our worries concern those things that are outside of our control. Is not it true that we are sometimes tempted to think that if only we could steer the course of our life, if only the control of things were in our hands, our worries would melt away. But think

about it. That means that only those things that are in the hands of God are things that make us worried. In our own minds we are not sure that God will take good care of us. So often we cannot let go and let God take care of things.

Then our cares and worries are acts that reveal the weakness of our faith. They show that we do not trust God to do us good. And behind it is the sad reality that we do not want God's will but our own. We want life, peace, prosperity, health, and strength. We want our families around us and our loved ones with us. But God has His own will, which is sovereign and good. And we forget that His will is much higher than ours, and that He is much wiser than we. When our desires are threatened, we begin to be filled with worry and dread.

Now, this calling to be anxious in nothing does not mean that we attempt to be stoical and try to steel ourselves in the face of adversity. We certainly are not to greet every event, no matter how difficult or tragic, with a shrug of our shoulders. It is not our calling to be immune to feeling and hardened to real emotions.

The calling not to worry, to "be careful for nothing," means that there is not one thing that can possibly make us anxious. Positively, we are to be content in everything. As Paul expresses it in verse 11, "For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." What a blessing of grace is contentment! With contentment we find that we receive nothing but good from the hand of our heavenly Father. We lay hold on the truth that whatever befalls us in this valley of tears is for our advantage. We rest in the truth that God is sovereignly directing all things for the salvation of His people. When this conviction settles upon our soul, worries are diminished. We are able to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul."

A certain cure

How is this spirit of contentment, this freedom from worry to be attained? What is the cure for worry? The answer that the apostle gives is quite simply: PRAYER! "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Are you burdened with worries and anxious cares? Pray! "Let your requests be made known unto God"—literally, "before God." Do not turn to yourself and work yourself into a frenzy of worry. Flee to the throne of grace. Appear before God's face. Pour out your heart unto Him! Unburden your heart to Him. The psalmist sings in Psalm 62, "Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us."

Prayer is a wonderful privilege of grace granted only through the cross of Christ. Prayer carries God's chil-

dren into His presence. Prayer is the way to freedom from worry. This verse contains the three common scriptural words for prayer. "By prayer" refers to prayer in general, which really includes the other words for prayer. "Supplication" refers to prayer for particular benefits. It has the idea of petition. And "with thanksgiving" refers to the proper thankfulness of prayer. By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving we are to let our requests be made known unto God. The purpose is not to inform God of what our requests are. He knows our needs far better than we do. But the point is that it is in prayer that we bring our needs to God—our needs that lie at the root of our worries.

When we do this, we will find, on the one hand, that we have personal desires that are a cause of many of our worries, which are not really needs at all. Before God those things die upon our lips. In His presence we realize how foolish we often are, how vain our fears, how empty our worries. But on the other hand, the real needs and concerns that we have and that tend to make us anxious will largely be dissolved before God. Casting our cares upon Him, we know He makes our cares His own. We are filled with the assurance that our heavenly Father is directing all things for our good in the wise way He is pleased to lead us. We hear Him speak, "Be still and know that I am God." We are able to be thankful whatever the circumstances that have befallen us.

This does not mean that it is easy. It is often extremely difficult. We struggle to understand why. Why would God take my spouse? My parent? My child? Why would He lead me in this way of affliction? Why would He give me this financial burden to bear? Only by grace through faith is it possible. Then, even when we cannot comprehend God's way and grasp the whole picture, we believe that all things work for our good.

A familiar illustration makes this point so beautifully: a woven tapestry or piece of embroidery work. From the underside we see a mass of thread and knots, a real mess, a meaningless web of discolor and disharmony. But, then, look at the upper side of the tapestry and we behold a beautiful pattern! It is woven with the same thread that from the underside seemed so disordered. So it is that now we are looking at the underside of life. And it frequently looks tangled, garbled, and ugly. But one day we shall see from above and see things as God sees them. We will understand the purpose of each dark thread woven into the pattern of our life. We will see that it was all a beautiful and necessary part of the whole pattern that God had ordained for us. Now, by faith, we sometimes get a glimpse of the pattern, but in heaven we will see the glorious whole. Knowing this, we can pray with thanksgiving instead of worrying!

A blessed promise

There is a sure blessing that the apostle attaches to this exhortation, “And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” God is a God of perfect peace because there is in Him perfect love and harmony. By nature sinful man has no peace. “There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked” (Is. 48:22). But peace comes through the blood of the cross. Christ shed His blood for us, establishing peace through reconciliation of God and His elect. Being brought into fellowship with the God of peace, we experience peace in our own hearts.

The apostle calls this the peace “which passeth all understanding” because it is impossible to comprehend. It is so great, so wonderful, so beautiful, so blessed that it defies all description. It is to be taken into the very covenant life of God Himself and to dwell in the peace of His blessed life.

What comfort is ours as this peace dispels all anxiety and worry! It quiets the storms of our lives, banishing doubts and fears. It is the calm assurance of faith and

the serenity of hope. This peace is calmness in life’s tempests and joy in the midst of our tears. It is contentment whatever the circumstances of life.

And notice that this peace is our defense! The apostle uses a military term here when he speaks of this peace “*keeping* our hearts and minds.” Literally we read, “will guard your hearts and minds.” He describes peace as a strong castle or fortress guarded by soldiers. The idea is that worries and anxieties storm against our minds and attempt to throw our hearts into turmoil and unrest. The cares and burdens of life attack us in an effort to fill us with worries. But when this peace fills us, we are guarded safely from life’s worries. We rest in the peace of our God. We are hidden in Christ, safely kept, in perfect peace.

Let us not live in worry and anxiety. Rather, let us pray! Let your requests be made known unto God. Pray without ceasing. Pray that He will keep your hearts and minds in Christ. Then we can face the future as dark and uncertain as it may be. And we will experience the blessed peace of God that passes all understanding!



Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters, professor of Practical Theology and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Why such evils in the United States?

The USA is rushing to ruin, a ‘victim’ of her own out-of-control passions for sex, violence, lies, godless pleasures, and every form of wickedness. Some might say she is going to hell in a handbasket, but that sounds to be making light of a very serious matter. Our society is plunging herself into ruin, asking for a tsunami to overcome her from both the Atlantic and Pacific.

Recently, some in our society have been pushing back against a few of the evils that most disturb them. The media and others who have a voice in our society have been complaining of, even objecting vehemently to, a trio of evils that have shown themselves among us: sexual assault, mass murder, and lies (aka: “fake news”).

But the objections are hypocritical because, while venting their spleen against these particular forms of evil, society approves and promotes dozens of other kinds of the same sin. It is a self-righteous rampage. Objecting to mass murderers wielding AK-47s, while at

the same time approving the killing of unborn children and paying to be entertained by violence, is hypocritical. Condemning sexual predators while sponsoring every other form of fornication in entertainment and society is two-faced. As for fake news (a horrible euphemism for “bald lies”), our country has for so long winked at yellow journalism, one-sided reporting, and tabloid excesses that to censure fake news now is worse than disingenuous. At the deepest level, the USA has rejected Truth with a capital T and therefore cannot be serious about a desire for truth in any area.

In this swiftly decaying society the church of Christ must exist. We must live and witness. But we must not partake of her evils in any shape or form, lest we plunge ourselves into the same ruin into which our country plummets.

In the January 15 editorial, I observed primarily the *what* of our country’s wickedness. Now, I ask *why*?

Why such increase of evil among us?

Why such evils, and why their rapid and unprecedented upsurge?

Also non-Christians are looking to find answers to this question. At least some of the more thoughtful among them are interested. But for them there is no real answer. Since “evil” is a theological category, a word that expresses moral judgments, non-Christians have a very difficult time with the concept. It forces them to ask the unpleasant questions such as, “What are the *standards* for moral judgments?” and, “Who has the right to make or change these standards?” Since these questions lead them to consider the testimony of the Christian faith and the Word of God, and to consider God Himself, the questions put them on edge. In the end, they are forced to admit that, without Jehovah God, there are no standards that promote the safety and preservation of the nation.

For a couple of generations already most state-run universities and public high schools have been indoctrinating students that there are no absolute moral standards, that nothing is objectively right or wrong. That is, there is no ultimate rule or “ruler” by which conduct can be measured, no “straightedge” with which actions may be judged crooked or straight. Our society, generally, has rejected God, the “Ruler” (both senses apply) by whom all actions can be measured; has discarded God, the “Straightedge” who determines whether conduct is upright or perverted, righteous or crooked.

The world without God nevertheless continues to use the word *evil* to describe mass murders, sexual offenses, and fake news simply because it cannot think of a better term to describe something they disapprove or just wish had not happened. So, after they label these unpleasant realities ‘evil,’ they either shout profanities at some ‘god’ who ought to have intervened if he really were able, or blame another political party for not doing enough to prevent the atrocities. Or—which is the solution of the masses—try to ignore the evils by immersing themselves in entertainment, the modern form of hiring a jester, as kings of old would do to divert their attention from their kingdom’s problems. Oh, “the seductive power of distractive materialism,” as one put it. Another quipped, “Humankind cannot bear very much reality.”

But even much of today’s church world is at a loss to explain the presence of such evils. Where *does* God fit in the sad state of affairs of our country? The liberal church would say that He is doing His best. Others contend that God is strong enough, but has bound Himself not to get in man’s way. Still others, determined to be more biblical, will have a difficult time fitting the in-

crease of wickedness into their postmillennial optimism or their neo-Calvinist vision of the future.

How, then, to understand these evils? How *is* this ramping up of evil to be explained? What must a Reformed Christian say?

The judgments of God

The answer to the questions, “Why the increase, why the dramatic upturn in evil, why the overwhelming wickedness sweeping across the land like a tsunami come inland?” is: God’s judgments are rolling. God’s judgments come upon nations, societies, churches, even individuals and families who turn from Him. As a judgment upon their sinful rejection of His will, the righteous God gives men over to *greater* sin. And greater. And greater. Until they are overwhelmed by the sin itself.

Here, we must be very careful. God is not the author of sin. The Belgic Confession’s statement in Article 13 is essential: “God neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are committed...” (see also the Canons of Dordt, III/IV:15, and the Canons’ Conclusions). The holy and upright God is not to be blamed for any sin. He cannot sin (James 1:13; II Cor. 5:21, etc.). However, that holy God has promised that, without sinning Himself or approving sin in any way, He would judge man’s sin with more sin, that He would punish man’s evil with more evil, that He would give what sinful man asks for until it “comes out at his nostrils” as He did for Israel when, unsatisfied with manna, they wickedly lusted after meat. I will give it to you, God said in His anger, until it becomes “loathsome to you” (Num. 11:20).

The explanation, therefore, for the escalation of evil in our land is God’s just judgment. Soon, God’s *final* judgment will come upon the land that rejects Him. It *is* coming upon her already now.

We must not overlook the place of the devil. God sovereignly uses the devil to accomplish some of His judgments upon men. We are not ignorant of his devices. Satan is very active in the world, creating the waves he hopes will overwhelm the church as well as the world. But we will not focus on the devil, but on God, the righteous God whose Word makes very clear what happens to our country, and what will happen to churches and families that reject Him.

The ‘law’ that governs all of life, revealed already in the Old Testament, is clear: “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Job 4:8, Prov. 22:8), and often shall reap far *more* than he sows. Thus, the man who sows the *wind* reaps the *whirlwind* (Hos. 8:7), that is, the storm-wind—tornado, hurricane, cyclone. And Paul teaches that the man who sows to the flesh reaps

corruption (Gal. 6:7,8, where “corruption” is “destruction” or “ruin”). That’s the inescapable ‘law of life.’

Behind that ‘law of life’ is the hand of the righteous God Himself. As God gives to one kernel of corn sown the fruit of one hundred more kernels, so to one impenitent evil He sovereignly and justly gives one-hundred-fold evil. Romans 1 explains that *God* “gives men up to uncleanness” who “change the truth of God into a lie, and worship and serve the creature more than the Creator.” *God* gives them “up unto vile affections” who do “not like to retain God in their knowledge.” *God* gives “over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” those who “changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image.” *God* is judging sin with more sin.

The Word of God, therefore, has the explanation why the United States of America is swimming in and choking upon its own vomit. God comes in righteous judgment upon her.

The Heidelberg Catechism expresses the biblical truth that God is “terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins; and will punish them in His just judgment *temporally* and eternally” (Q & A 10). God does not reserve His judgments for eternity, but justly judges also *temporally*. He punishes wickedness every day. He judges the sin that wicked men want with more of that sin. Man wants illicit sex. God gives it to him in greater and greater measures until he chokes on it and it destroys him. Man wants violence. God gives him over to violence until the violence consumes him and his society. Man wants to live by lies. Very soon God delivers him up to “fake news” until no one can distinguish lie from truth, everyone mistrusts everyone else, and society comes unraveled.

All of which means that the USA is no ‘victim’ at all, as the opening line of this editorial suggested. But only *suggested*. Which is why *victim* was put in quotation marks. The USA is no innocent victim, but the object of God’s wrath, the convicted criminal receiving the sentence our society knows it deserves.

God “gives them over to their own lusts.” This is God’s explanation in Romans 1.

Romans 1 explains what is happening in our land and others. God gives unrighteous men over to every sort of sin. Among many other sins, the three we have looked at are listed there. Note in these quotations the specific sins objected to by our society today. Men and women are

filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil

things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.

The pinnacle of God’s awful judgments Romans 1 lists first. They

dishonor their own bodies between themselves...their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

The Word of God is so clear here that we can (and we should) explain to our children what is happening to our society: God “gives them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient...” It is His judgment upon those who reject His law, the law that starts with, “Have Me alone as your God,” and includes, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” “Thou shalt not kill,” and “Thou shalt not bear false witness.” Abounding sex, increasing violence, and the glut of fake news are God’s judgment on a society and people who reject God.

The application to Christians

Romans 1 was written, however, not only to teach what happens to societies that reject God, but what happens also to churches and families and individuals who do so. This, too, must be part of the education of our children. God gives over to their sin *churches* who want sin. God judges *families* in their generations who permit sin, who do not retain God in their knowledge, or who ‘love’ God with their mind but not with their heart. A reprobate mind and all the sins that flow out of that mind are the just reward of men and women who worship and serve the creation more than the Creator.

Meditate on all these realities. Then plead with God not to reward us—churches and families—with the judgments we deserve, with the judgments now coming upon our nation. Pray that He humble us with sorrow for our part in these sins, forgive us our manifold transgressions, and deliver us from the evils that are so natural to us. Pray God to teach us to hate sin and to love Him with everything in us. God forbid that we boast.

Thou, Jehovah, art a God Who delightest not in sin;
Evil shall not dwell with Thee, nor the proud Thy favor win.
Evildoers Thou dost hate, lying tongues Thou wilt
defeat;

God abhors the man who loves violence and base deceit.
(Psalter, #9)



All around us

Rev. Erik Guichelaar, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin

Museum of the Bible

On November 17, 2017, in Washington, D.C., the museum capital of the world, another museum opened its doors. Only three blocks from the Capitol Building, the state-of-the-art Museum of the Bible will showcase over 40,000 objects in a 430,000-square-foot building, including first editions of the King James Bible, fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls, biblical papyri and manuscripts, and the largest collection of Torah scrolls. The purpose? According to its website, “To invite all people to engage with the Bible.”¹

The founder of Museum of the Bible is Steve Green, CEO of the popular retailer Hobby Lobby. In an interview with *Christianity Today*, Steve Green explains how the idea for the museum originally came about:

Our family has been very blessed, and we try to give resources to things that align with our biblical principles that will have lasting value for our world. So when someone brought the idea of a Bible museum to us many years ago, we gathered as a family and decided that this was an idea worth pursuing, given our family’s love for the Bible and the impact this great book has had on all of us.

In 2009, we began to acquire a variety of biblical texts and artifacts in order to tell the Bible’s story. Our aim was, and still is, to give everyone access to them by placing them on display in a museum or in a traveling exhibit so they could be learned from and enjoyed.

We did a study to determine the best city that would have the greatest potential that would draw guests, and we discovered it was Washington, D.C.²

The Museum of the Bible includes three main exhibition floors, each with a theme: the 2nd floor focuses on the impact that the Bible has had throughout both world history and U.S. history; the 3rd floor focuses on the history contained in the Bible itself, with exhibits that showcase the geography and culture of Bible times; and the 4th floor concentrates on the history of the Bi-

ble as a book, showcasing many manuscripts and rare copies of the Bible. The 5th floor includes a high-tech theatre, along with a two-story atrium glass galley that overlooks the National Mall and U.S. Capitol. The museum also boasts having the largest children’s area of any museum in Washington, D.C.

In a write-up for *Answers* magazine, Melissa Webb explains one way in which the Museum of the Bible aims to be the most technologically advanced museum in the world, and also aims to give an engaging experience for every member of the family:

Museum of the Bible isn’t a typical museum where you aimlessly walk around until you’re ready to leave....

Each guest receives a personal digital guide, which makes it easy to plot their entire experience. The device’s navigation and supplementary content serve as a tour guide through the museum, providing each person the chance to customize what interests them most in the time available for their visit and the flow of crowds that day.

In addition, the system allows for 3-D interactivity with biblical artifacts, as well as virtual and augmented reality. For example, you can turn the pages of a beautiful medieval manuscript or explore the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. The digital guide also contains audio content, designed to help guests dive deeper into the narrative, history, and impact of the Bible.

Based on its humble beginnings as a private collection, you might expect the museum to display row after row of Green’s artifacts.

But the designers wanted a museum that appeals to everyone, not just history buffs. They wanted to combine technology and visual pizzazz in a way that moves people to understand the Bible’s history and ongoing relevance today.³

The cost involved in building this museum? Over half-a-billion dollars.

1 www.museumofthebible.org

2 Martyn Wendell Jones, “Steve Green Leaves His Mark on Washington,” *Christianity Today*, November 2017:42.

3 Melissa Webb, “The Bible Finds a Home in the Capital,” *Answers*, November-December 2017: 67-68.

The estimated time it would take to read every placard and take in every activity? 9 days at 8 hours per day.

The number of biblical gardens in the museum? One.

The cost of admission? Free, with a suggested \$15 donation.

Dr. R.C. Sproul (1939-2017)

On December 14, 2017, noted Reformed teacher, professor, pastor, and author, Dr. Robert Charles Sproul finished his race on earth, and was called to be with his Lord in glory. He was 78 years old.

Who was R.C. Sproul? To quote the words of one of the many tributes written after his death, “It is fair to say that R.C. was the greatest and most influential proponent of the recovery of Reformed theology in the last century.”⁴ To quote the words of another tribute, “No one has done more to put the knowledge of the Holy One front and center in thinking and living of Christians today [than R.C. Sproul].”⁵ I could share my own personal stories of how God used Sproul as a spiritual influence in my life as a young adult.

One of Sproul’s great strengths that made him such a powerful teacher was his ability to put profound teachings of Scripture into plain language. In a write-up for *The Gospel Coalition* on the life of R.C. Sproul, Justin Taylor puts it this way:

One of the great distinctions of R.C.’s teaching style was his use of a chalkboard, even when technology had advanced far beyond this classroom tool. It enabled laypeople to feel as if they were in a classroom by Professor Sproul, who refused to talk down to them, peppering his lectures with Latin phrases, but doing so in such an engaging way that listeners were more likely to lean in than to tune out. A master pedagogue, he combined an earnest seriousness with an evident joy over the material and the act of convincing his audience to follow his line of argument.”⁶

Indeed, it was from the chalkboard of Sproul that I first learned Luther’s phrase “Simul justus et peccator” (“Simultaneously righteous and a sinner!”).

Two of Sproul’s main emphases in his teaching were the sovereignty of God over all things and the holiness of God. Those are certainly two emphases every Christian can appreciate! Sproul also emphasized the iner-

rancy of the Scriptures, penning the Ligonier Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, which was further refined and developed, culminating in the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

After receiving a Bachelor’s degree in 1961 from Westminster College, a progressive Presbyterian school an hour north of Pittsburgh, Sproul went on to earn degrees from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and the Free University of Amsterdam. It was during his time at the progressive Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, that his conservative Calvinistic church history professor John Gerstner had a positive influence on Sproul, leading him to embrace Reformed theology.⁷ Through Gerstner’s influence, Sproul also did doctoral work at the Free University of Amsterdam under the famed Dutch reformer, G.C. Berkouwer.

Sproul was ordained as a minister in the United Presbyterian Church in the USA in 1965, but would later join the PCA in 1975. From 1969-1971, Sproul served as associate minister of theology and evangelism at College Hill Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. It was during this time that plans were made to establish the Ligonier Valley Study Center in the Ligonier Valley, an hour east of Pittsburgh. The purpose of this Study Center was to give lay people an opportunity to receive the benefits of seminary-level teaching without having to attend seminary. “Sproul saw his work as a filling a gap between Sunday School and seminary, helping Christian laypeople renew their minds as they learned Christian doctrine, ethics, and apologetics....”⁸ Sproul’s recorded lectures would be spread throughout the world. In 1984 the Study Center was renamed Ligonier Ministries and relocated to Orlando, Florida. In 1989, Sproul, who also taught at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi four months of the year, became the first academic dean at the RTS Orlando Campus. In 1997, the new, small congregation of Saint Andrew’s Chapel called Sproul to serve as their senior minister of preaching and teaching.

In his write-up on the life of R.C. Sproul, Justin Taylor notes the following about Sproul’s experience of serving as a pastor: “The great regret of [Sproul’s] life was that he waited until he was 58 years old to proclaim God’s Word from the pulpit week in and week out.”⁹

As I reflect on the many tributes given to R.C. Sproul in the past few weeks, I too thank God for gifted men

4 Albert Mohler, “A Bright and Burning Light: Robert Charles Sproul, February 13, 1939-December 14, 2017,” December 14, 2017 (albertmohler.com).

5 Sinclair Ferguson, “Have You Heard of R.C. Sproul?,” *Tabletalk*, December 15, 2017 (tabletalkmagazine.com).

6 Justin Taylor, “R.C. Sproul (1939-2017),” *The Gospel Coalition*, December 14, 2017 (thegospelcoalition.com).

7 If you have a copy of Prof. Engelsma’s *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, you will find in the front of that book a “Foreword” by John Gerstner.

8 Taylor, “R.C. Sproul (1939-2017).”

9 Taylor, “R.C. Sproul (1939-2017).”

like him who are able to communicate and teach the truths of God's Word in a powerful and effective way. Sproul's influence should impress upon us just how important it is to have men in the ministry who are apt to teach and preach, for it is the teaching and preaching of God's Word that God's people truly crave. Sproul's regrets also cause me to appreciate again the emphasis we

place as a denomination on the pastoral ministry. How precious is the weekly preaching of the gospel in our local congregations! May God continue to raise up also among us precious preachers and teachers of the Word!

For a more detailed account of Sproul's life, I encourage the reader to read Justin Taylor's blog entry, *R.C. Sproul (1939-2017)*, at thegospelcoalition.org.



Search the Scriptures

Rev. Thomas Miersma, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

All things come alike to all

Ecclesiastes 9:1-3

We saw last time that Solomon has reached a certain limitation in the wisdom he sought. He has just said, "Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea farther; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it out" (Eccl. 8:17). God's works transcend man's understanding, and beholding those works under the sun there is much hidden from us in God's counsel. The judgments of the righteous and sovereign God are deeper than wisdom can discern from what is seen under the sun.

Now he continues, "For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them" (Eccl. 9:1). This limitation he considers and spiritually takes to his own heart that he may declare or explain it also to us. The truth is that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. God holds His people, for that is who the righteous and the wise are, in His hand. God is indeed gracious and merciful to His people. He governs and directs their works in time under the sun according to His own counsel and purpose. As the objects of His grace and love, they and their works serve the realization of His counsel and purpose. This is known by faith through the promises of God. They and their works are truly in the hand of God, not simply as sovereign over them but as the One who upholds, governs, and directs them. That man's wisdom and understanding are limited does not mean we are devoid of comfort. Rather, by this limitation, we are

called to a childlike trust and confidence in God and His fatherly care.

This leads to an important conclusion when we contemplate what is seen under the sun: "no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them" (Eccl. 9:1). The love and hatred spoken of are the love and hatred of God. The scriptural idea of God's love embraces the truth of His grace, mercy, and goodness, while God's hatred includes His wrath, anger, and judgment. The point made is that you cannot and may not, by looking at external circumstances and the affairs of life that are before you (in front of your face), draw the conclusion that God either loves or hates you, your neighbor, or someone else. What you see under the sun does not itself reveal the attitude of God. To know that you must go to His revealed Word.

God is no respecter of persons. "He maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). Seeing this, you may not draw the conclusion that all men are the objects of His grace, not even a "common" grace, or find in it a general goodness of God toward men. God is good, all He does is good, and His gifts are good gifts in the creation. But they are not a revelation of a universal favor of God or an attitude of grace toward all. Solomon here rejects such a conclusion as false, for it is based on a mistaken inference from what is seen.

Similarly, when calamities come as they did to Job, you may not draw the conclusion that Job is a wicked man and God's wrath has come upon him in judgment. The prosperity of the wicked does not mean that God loves them. The poverty of Lazarus, in the parable of

the rich man and Lazarus, does not mean that God hated Lazarus and loved the rich man. In the parable the opposite is true (Luke 16:19-31).

The reality is, “All things come alike to all...” (Eccl. 9:2). God deals with men and the life of men organically, so that in the daily course of life “all things come alike to all.” Fruitful and barren years, riches and poverty, sickness and health are so in the hand of God that they come upon men personally and corporately in such a way that, in themselves, you may not draw from them the conclusion that God loves or hates this person or that person, this nation or that nation.

Sin manifestly has consequences, but all have sinned. All deserve the consequences of sin. But from what can be seen, the wrong interpretation may not be drawn. Jesus takes this up in its negative aspect when confronting the Jews,

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish (Luke 13:1-5).

The Word of God guards us from the erroneous conclusion that we are inclined by nature to draw from what we see. We would infer God’s love or hatred from external circumstances or from things seen under the sun. But grace and wrath are not in things. The point is important both in the practical circumstances of our own life as well as for our doctrinal understanding. “No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all...” (Eccl. 9:1, 2). It is exactly our natural tendency when things go well with us to feel that God loves us, and when things go wrong or badly that God is against us. The knowledge of God’s love, His chastening hand of correction for sin, the burden of a troubled conscience, belong to the knowledge of faith by the Word. God may use the circumstances of life or the consequences of our behavior to drive us to that truth revealed in His Word and to repentance, but we may not make a false inference from things in themselves. The same is true doctrinally for the theories of some universal favor or goodness of God in rain and sunshine. Such an inference is here repudiated by the text, so that it is well worth repeating: “No man knoweth either love or hatred by

all that is before them. All things come alike to all...” (Eccl. 9:1, 2).

This truth Solomon demonstrates in the rest of verse 2: death comes upon all. “There is one event to the righteous, and the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that that feareth an oath” (Eccl. 9:2). That one event is death, to which all are subject no matter whether they are good or evil, righteous or wicked. This contrast of good and evil, where yet one event comes upon all, means also that God’s righteous judgment is largely hidden from our sight under the sun. By faith we know that God is righteous and judges in time and eternity, but that does not mean that we may ourselves see this work of God with our earthly sight under the sun.

That all are subject to one event, namely death, brings out the truth that God is no respecter of persons and underscores the limitation of our understanding by what we see before us. All die and through death are subjected to vanity in this world and to a judgment hidden from us in that which is to come for an individual at the moment of his death. It is by faith in the light of God’s promises and His righteousness that Solomon confessed in the preceding chapter, “Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: but it shall not be well with the wicked...” (Eccl. 8:12, 13).

Further, Solomon points us to a certain fruit this reality has in the life of men. That no one knows love or hatred by all that is before him, that one event comes to all, that all are subject to vanity and death, all work a certain spiritual fruit in the life of man as he is fallen by nature. He says, “This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead” (Eccl. 9:3). The evil of which he speaks is not in what God does, but in the effect it has upon the heart of wicked man because he is a sinner.

He speaks of the “sons of men,” which may well have here the original sense of the word “men”—“sons of the man,” that is, Adam. For it is man as he is fallen in Adam and under the judgment of death who stands before us. Fallen man’s heart is “full of evil” and “madness;” the folly and blindness of sin is “in his heart.” The root of the problem is that man through the Fall into sin has become totally depraved. Evil is not only in his works and deeds, but in his heart. The heart is the spiritual center of man’s life, out of which arises the activity of his life in thinking and willing, working and

doing. The folly of sin resides there, in the heart of the fallen, unregenerated sinner.

Sinful man sees that there is one event to all, that all die and leave this life. He is confronted by the transitory vanity of this present life. He beholds the appearance, from what is seen with the eye, that there seems to be no difference between the good and the evil, the righteous and the wicked, because all leave this life. He draws the false conclusion: “What difference does it really make as to what I do?” He denies the judgment of God. He concludes as in Psalm 73:11, “And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?” The effect of this is that the evil conclusion is drawn that I should live it up now, take from life what I can get in pleasure and excitement, and live for myself. It works the spiritual fruit in the heart of sinful man that he gives himself over unto the lusts of his flesh and is held in bondage to sin, both because he is fallen and yet also is one who willingly serves sin.

It works through also in this way. Fallen man

through fear of death is in his lifetime subject to spiritual bondage. Sin reigns over him and in him, in his heart. Solomon describes this sad state: evil and madness in his heart “while they live, and after that they go to the dead.” They leave this life and go to the grave, and all they have in this life, their portion in the things of this world, is taken away. They die and depart forever from the earth. They wrongly conclude: “Get it now!” because God is not in their thoughts.

It belongs to the wonder of our salvation that Jesus Christ assumed our human nature from Adam to overcome death and its power to enslave us, that having redeemed us unto God, He might transform us from being sons of Adam to being sons of God. “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14, 15).



Believing and confessing

Rev. Rodney Kleyn, pastor of Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Spokane, Washington

Lawful oaths and vows

Lord's Day 37

Question 101. May we then swear religiously by the name of God?

Answer. Yes; either when the magistrates demand it of the subjects; or when necessity requires us thereby to confirm fidelity and truth to the glory of God and the safety of our neighbor; for such an oath is founded on God's Word, and therefore was justly used by the saints both in the Old and New Testament.

Question 102. May we also swear by saints or any other creatures?

Answer. No; for a lawful oath is calling upon God, as the only one who knows the heart, that He will bear witness to the truth, and punish me if I swear falsely; which honor is due to no creature.

This Lord's Day, which continues the treatment of the third commandment, is really an appendix to the previous Lord's Day and treats one particular application of not using God's name in vain. God's name, we saw, is the sum of all that He is. His name is His entire self-revelation. When the commandment speaks of “taking” God's name, it is referring to our taking up God's name either upon ourselves or with our lips—how we represent God or speak of Him.

In an oath or vow a person calls on God, who cannot lie and is omniscient, and who also knows the hearts of man, to be his witness. An oath and a vow are not the same thing, though they are similar. An oath is a solemn declaration that what is said is true, whereas a vow is a solemn promise to fulfill an obligation. In both cases, God is called on to be witness and to curse or punish where the oath is a lie or the vow is broken.

A relevant question

May we swear, whether it be an oath or a vow?

This was an important practical question at the time of the Reformation. In the Roman Catholic Church many rash and foolish vows were taken, especially monastic vows and vows of celibacy. These vows were based on the false theology that taught that by celibacy or self-deprivation one merited God's favor. The Reformers taught that these were sinful vows and that the one who had taken such vows needed to repent and turn from his vow. Even more pressing was the question of swearing in the name of saints or angels instead of God. If you swear "over my mother's dead body," you call on her to vouchsafe for your truthfulness and be your judge should you lie, something that only God can do.

Still another question was whether oaths were lawful at all. The radical and Anabaptist branch of the Reformation said that all oaths were wrong, including swearing allegiance to a country or to military service. They even taught that marriage is an agreement into which one entered "on good faith," not as a vow before God. Part of the Anabaptist thinking was that the civil government, if not Christian, was not legitimate and certainly had no right to use God's name in the civil sphere.

If we think through that history and the issues involved, we can see that these are still legitimate issues today. We live under governments that are largely non-Christian and even anti-Christian. Both the legislative and judicial powers are pushing to silence biblical Christianity and to take away religious freedoms. And we ask, "Do these rulers and judges really have the right to rule? How can a judge who denies God put me under oath to God?" These are important questions because how we think on these issues not only answers the question whether we may take an oath or vow, but also reveals our entire attitude toward the civil authorities.

One other thing that makes this relevant is that every one of us, maybe without realizing it, has taken vows and made oaths, and in some cases at the demand of the civil authority. For example, if you are married, you once made vows, and you hold a license from the state, which acts in God's behalf to legalize your marriage. Your marriage vows were not merely personal, between you and your spouse with a few friends and family around, but were vows you made before God and by the demand of the state. So also, when we sign our tax return, we are put under an oath of honesty by the state. Also, every one of us is a citizen of some country, and even if we have never taken an oath of citizenship to become a citizen, by our birth we are sworn citizens. Besides this, as believers, we make oaths and vows in the sphere of the church, such as confession of faith and

baptism vows concerning children. These are made before God and attested to by the church and her officers.

The biblical answer

How do we justify the practice of vows and oaths, particularly as demanded by a secular government?

First, we must recognize the legitimacy of civil authority. The principle behind the swearing of an oath is that the civil authority is appointed by God. The Anabaptist says that since Jesus is the only King, His only legitimate rule comes in the sphere of the church, and that there we simply trust one another by letting our "yes" be "yes" and our "no" be "no" (Matt. 5:37). Whenever we are tempted to think that the government, because it is secular and anti-Christian, does not warrant our honor, then we must be reminded of what Scripture says in Romans 13:1-7 (especially the phrases I have italicized):

Let *every soul* be subject unto the higher powers. For *there is no power but of God*: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, *resisteth the ordinance of God*: and they that resist shall receive to themselves *damnation*. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For *he is the minister of God to thee* for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for *he is the minister of God*, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also *for conscience sake*. For *for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers*, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

What is abundantly clear in this passage is that the civil authority has its power and right to rule from God and so is the representative of God to us in this world. That is also true where the ruler does not himself acknowledge God and where he abuses his position for personal gain. He has his place by the appointment of God, and none of us are above civil authority, because civil authority is God's authority. Civil authority is necessary in the earth because "all men are liars," and so sin needs physical restraint.

When Jesus speaks on this subject in Matthew 5, He does not forbid all oaths and vows, but rather points to two things. First, that in general conversation between Christians vows and oaths should not be necessary. We ought to be able to trust the word of our fellow Christian. Second, that if we are required to take an oath,

we ought to do it, indeed may only do it, in God's name.

When Jesus says, "Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King," He is addressing human and pharisaical traditions that taught the people to swear by something other than God because then they could more easily be absolved of the responsibility of keeping the oath made. This was something practiced, not only in official settings, as before a judge, but had become a part of daily conversation and was the justification for the flippant use of the oath. Jesus exposes this as hypocrisy because God is still witness to your oath, even if you only take it in the name of heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or your own head. Regardless, God is still the Judge and Searcher of hearts, whether you use His name or not. Hence, if you are going to take an oath, it must be done in God's name because, as the Catechism says, He "is the only one who knows the heart."

Furthermore, from the many examples in the rest of Scripture we see that oaths, in God's name, are frequently used either before a magistrate or when circumstances demand it in order to affirm the truth. Abraham swore to the king of Sodom (Gen. 14:22) and to Abimelech (Gen. 21:24). Abraham's servant vowed to get a wife for Isaac from Haran (Gen. 24:2-9). Joshua and the leaders of Israel took a vow before God regarding the Gibeonites, which vow they kept (Josh. 9:15). Boaz made a promise regarding marriage to Ruth in the name of Jehovah (Ruth 3:13). David made a promise to Bathsheba "by the name of the LORD" (I Kings 1:29, 30). And, lest we think this was merely an Old Testament practice, we should note that at least five times in the New Testament Paul calls on God as his witness, and that Jesus Himself, under oath before the High Priest, affirmed that He was the Christ (Matt. 26:63, 64). And, then, there is the interesting contrast in Hebrews 6 between men swearing "by the greater," (that is, by God), and God "because he could swear by no greater" swearing "by himself," which does not condemn swearing in God's name, but affirms the truth that God is the only one by whose name we may swear.

The conclusion, then, is not that we may not swear an oath, but that the oath should be used sparingly in conversation, and that for the Christian the taking of an oath, when required, is ultimately a confession concerning God and His truth and omniscience. Such reverent oaths can also benefit our fellow man. An oath is necessary because man cannot always be trusted, but under oath a Christian can promote justice for the benefit of his neighbor.

Our solemn duty

Our duty is, first, to be honest in daily life. As Christians we are, in a sense, always under oath, living before the face of God. An oath is a necessary reminder of this, but really an oath does not change anything. In all our daily interactions and relationships, we ought to be honest and trustworthy. Others ought to be able to trust us and take us at our word. We should not have to spend our time questioning the words and motives of fellow believers because our "yes" should mean "yes" and our "no" should mean "no."

Second, our duty is to be and remain committed to the vows that we take. We need to take seriously our solemn duties before God. From the signing of an employment document to the vows of marriage, and from the vow of confession of faith to the vow at baptism regarding our duty towards our children, we place ourselves under solemn obligation before God. We cannot simply walk away from or abandon these vows, for in doing that we "take the name of God in vain" and "there is no sin greater or more provoking to God than the profaning of His name."

Questions for discussion

1. What is the difference between an oath and a vow?
2. Who is always the witness to what we say or promise?
3. What were/are some of the Roman Catholic practices for vows and oaths?
4. What was the response of the Anabaptists to these Catholic practices?
5. What was the response of the Reformers, and how was it different to both the Roman Catholic and Anabaptist positions?
6. May we swear on the Bible when demanded to do so by a judge in a courtroom setting? Why/why not?
7. Why is it important to have a proper view of civil government and our duty toward them? How is this connected to the question of oaths and vows?
8. How might a vow or oath that you take protect the welfare of other people?
9. What are some of the oaths and vows that you have taken and are obligated to keep?
10. Why is it important to remember that, ultimately, an oath is taken and a promise is made before *God*, and not merely before other people?
11. How is the oath of marriage desecrated today? Did you ever think of this as a form of taking God's name in vain? How does this help you in keeping your marriage vows?
12. What is Jesus teaching in Matthew 5 concerning our daily conversation and interaction with fellow Christians? Are your motives always pure in what you say or expect of others?



Taking heed to the doctrine

Rev. Brian Huizinga, pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California

Why?

Why take heed to doctrine? The title of this rubric is “Taking Heed to the Doctrine.” Writing for this rubric, I must take heed to doctrine. Reading this rubric, you take heed to doctrine. Before writing one article in explanation of the doctrine of the Reformed faith, an examination of the reason for the whole enterprise of theology and the importance of doctrine should be conducted. In any endeavor it is good to ask “why? Why do you do what you do?” And because young pastor Timothy, who was exhorted to take heed to the doctrine, was *first* exhorted to take heed to *himself* (I Tim. 4:16, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine...”), it will be good to examine the Scriptures and ask, “Why *should* I take heed to doctrine?” But with that, also to examine my (our) own heart and ask, “Why *do* I take heed to doctrine?”

The biblical term “doctrine” means “teaching.” To “take heed” means “to hold onto and pay close attention to.” Why hold tightly and pay close attention to the teachings of the Bible?

Jesus did. Upon the commencement of Jesus’ earthly ministry, a wave of astonishment rolled over Palestine because of his doctrine. Matthew concludes his inspired telling of Jesus’ great Sermon on the Mount with this notice repeated often by the gospel writers: “...the people were astonished at his doctrine,” (Matt. 7:28). Regardless of what the audiences did with Jesus’ doctrine, it is clear that Jesus took heed to the doctrine. Why?

Why should the officebearer like Paul or Timothy and even the individual believer in an unofficial capacity, especially amid all the busyness and responsibilities of life, eagerly study, diligently read, rigorously defend, carefully write, and enthusiastically teach and bear witness to doctrine?

Why should we continually pursue exactness of theological expression in the finer and broader points of the essentials truths of Scripture, both personally and ecclesiastically?

Why have, maintain, and use creeds of doctrinal statements and seek communion with other church-

es only on the basis of complete agreement with those statements?

Why should the preacher labor to bring the meat of sound, carefully explained and edifying doctrine into the pulpit each week? And why should the believer expect and seek such doctrine?

Of all the profitable things to teach children about themselves and their world, why teach them doctrine and require them to know terms like “imputation” or “propitiation” and memorize doctrinal formulations? And why teach them that, according to our Reformed confession, the first criterion for determining whether a church is a true church of Christ is if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein? And why train them with a view to standing up in the assembly of the saints one day to promise, “I acknowledge the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the Articles of the Christian faith and taught here in this Christian church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation and I am resolved by the grace of God to adhere to this doctrine and reject all heresies repugnant thereto”?

Why charge some doctrines as being false, even heretical and wicked, declaring that not everything is true and not everyone is right? Why promise to do this as an officebearer?

When a friend or family member desires to separate from your congregation because of an alleged excessiveness in taking heed to doctrine, what do you say?

Taking heed to doctrine likely will not immediately benefit the physical condition and improve the felt needs of one human being. Giving a thirsty man a drink or a shivering woman a garment will immediately improve their condition. But spending an entire evening struggling through 25 pages of Luther’s *Bondage of the Will* or memorizing an answer from the Heidelberg Catechism will not immediately improve the felt condition of anyone; in fact, focusing intensely and intelligibly upon the sense of each sentence will probably give one a headache, making his felt condition worse.

Taking heed to doctrine may even bring a sword of division in homes and relationships.

Why take heed to doctrine?

In this article and the next I intend to present six answers to the question “why?”

1. Confession: Because doctrine is what we say about God and what we say about God is enormously important.

Doctrine is a thematic summary of what the Bible teaches on a certain subject. Because the Bible is God’s revelation of Himself, the Bible’s teaching is a description in words of who God is, what God does, and what God commands. Jesus called His doctrine (teachings) “God’s words” (John 8:47) because those words were not only *from* God but *about* God. Doctrine is what we say *about* God.

With our tongues and from our hearts we must say something about God. The Bible calls this a confession (Rom. 10:9-10). God did not graciously reveal Himself in His Son our Lord Jesus Christ or even manifest Himself in the creation around us so that we keep silent before that revelation. Silence is wicked. Misspeaking is worse. Deliberate blasphemy is worst of all, for God will not hold him guiltless who profanes His revelation.

We must speak of God in confession of doctrine and what we say about God is enormously important, for God is *God*.

Even what we say about people is important. Misspell someone’s name, and they will spot it a mile away. Mispronounce someone’s first name, and they will hear it from the next town over. Unintentionally misspeak and misrepresent a politician’s educational credentials and career accomplishments while introducing him to an audience, and he will quietly grind in his soul. Maliciously slander another’s character or work, and you will draw his ire and provoke God to wrath. The Bible exhorts us to speak the truth in love, and an entire commandment—the ninth—is devoted to what we say about other people.

We are infinitesimally small specks of dust in the vast expanse of the universe. We are not infinitely glorious. We did not create heaven and earth. We did not redeem elect humanity unto everlasting life. And yet it is universally recognized—by believers, by heathens, and by professing Christians who have an aversion to doctrine and the zealous maintenance of it—that what we say about the identity, character, and work of our fellow human beings is very important.

What about God? God is God! God is the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, the awesomely holy Creator of matchless glory, the God of redemption in Jesus Christ, whose mercy is as great as the heaven is high above the earth. Why take heed to doctrine? Be-

cause doctrine is what we say about *God*, and what we say about *God* is more important than anything else.

If, for example, we say that regeneration is the Spirit’s sovereign and gracious work of pervading the inmost recesses of the spiritually dead, elect sinner and creating spiritual life in him, or if we say regeneration is the Spirit’s work of bestowing life upon a sinner in response to his request for it through his decision to devote his life to Jesus, we are making two radically different, mutually exclusive doctrinal statements. Both cannot be right. Does it even matter? Most definitely! What we say about a doctrine such as regeneration is what we say about God, for He is the Author of regeneration. God has revealed to us in Scripture this highly celebrated, supernatural, most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable work that is not inferior in efficacy to creation or the resurrection from dead. We must say something about it! We must confess it! And every doctrinal statement we make of regeneration or any other work of God is enormously important because we are saying something about God Himself. In doctrinal controversies the church of Christ is not engaged in an inconsequential and trivial war over words, but is battling for the honor of the Most High who reveals Himself in the person of the incarnate Word Jesus Christ and through written words in Scripture.

2. Love: Because knowing doctrine is knowing the God whom we love.

Doctrine describes our God. We come to know our God and all the greatness of His being and the wonders of His love through the teachings of the Bible. The doctrine of creation reveals the matchless power and wisdom of Jehovah in whom our help stands. The doctrine of the passion and death of Christ reveals the boundless love of the God who gave His Son to that inexpressible suffering on our behalf; it reveals the burning holiness of God who so hates sin and loves Himself as the highest good that He must punish sin with extreme, that is, everlasting punishment of body and soul; and it reveals the heavenly righteousness of God whose justice required such suffering for complete satisfaction. Biblical doctrine reveals our God as He really is—a consuming fire to His despisers and a compassionate Father to His adopted children and heirs.

To be saved by grace is to be incorporated into the everlasting fellowship of God’s covenant, so that we know Him savingly and cleave to Him in love. We eat and drink with Him. Like righteous Abraham, we are His friends. All those who truly love and walk with God take heed to doctrine because through their

knowledge of doctrine they grow in their knowledge of and love for their covenant Friend.

If a young man takes a young woman to a restaurant and loses himself in his phone or the football game on the wall behind her head, then his words “I love you” are empty. The proof is that he has no interest in knowing her. But if he really loved her, he would find such pleasure in getting to know everything about her, her background, her education, her family, her work, her interests, her spiritual convictions, and even such petty things as whether she prefers dark or milk chocolate. If it concerns *her*, he wants to *know* it because he *loves* her.

If the Christian takes the name of God and Jesus Christ upon his lips but loses himself in his earthly life, then his words “I love God” are empty. The proof is that he has no interest in knowing God. If we really love God—and, praise God, we do!—then we find pleasure in the reading, studying, hearing, and discussing of sound doctrine because through knowing that doctrine we come to know better and love deeper our God.

It is very discouraging for elders to hear a church member, or for parents to hear a child, or for companions to hear a friend say, “I don’t really care about doctrine,” or to demonstrate the same by their conduct because they are essentially saying, “I don’t care about and love God and His Son Jesus Christ.” How can you know and love God without knowing doctrine?

It is a gracious privilege almost too wonderful to be-

lieve that the triune God of transcendent glory and infinite perfections, who dwells in supremely blessed communion in His own eternal being, should take knowledge of us contemptible rebels, who are nothing of ourselves and even less than vanity, and by the precious blood of His beloved Son take us into His communion, transform us into His likeness, and give us true knowledge of Him by sharing His secrets with us so that we might know Him intimately in love. Why take heed to doctrine? Because knowing doctrine is knowing God whom we love.

Naboth the Jezreelite loved and therefore took heed to (held onto and paid close attention to) his inheritance as a parcel of land in Canaan—a type of his covenant salvation in Christ. For refusing to sell his heritage Naboth was murdered by the king and queen. God is our heritage. God’s people sing in Psalm 16:5, “The Lord is the portion of my inheritance...” and in Psalm 73:26, “My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” Inasmuch as the biblical doctrine of God is the revelation of our God—whom to know is life eternal—doctrine is our heritage. Every spiritual Naboth prizes his doctrinal heritage and is willing to die for it.

Why take heed to doctrine? Because we love God.

Next time we will consider the importance of doctrine in relation to worship, salvation, life, and unity with each other.



Ministering to the saints

Prof. Douglas Kuiper, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Psalter revision: Governing principles (6) music

Previous article in this series: November 15, 2017, p. 75.

In my last two articles I developed three reasons why the interdenominational committee is proposing changes to some of the music (tunes) of our Psalter: 1) the tunes must serve the lyrics well; 2) the tunes must serve the congregation by enabling her to sing the lyrics well; and 3) some Psalter numbers are rarely sung, raising the question whether a change of music would serve the congregations well. Although I developed these reasons, I did not invent them. One reason why some initially

explored the idea of Psalter revision was the recognition that “some tunes are difficult to sing due to their range or simply the nature of the tune.”¹ When the PRC Synod approved the PRC’s participation in the project, it did so recognizing that “not every tune is appropriate

¹ Minutes of the Joint Psalter Revision Exploratory Meeting, January 13, 2015, Art. 4, a, 3), as found in the PRC *Acts of Synod 2015*, 131, and the PRC *Acts of Synod 2015*, 137.

to the content of the Psalm” and “some tunes need to be re-pitched/re-keyed.”²

As is the case with proposed changes to the format (layout) and text (words) of the Psalter, the committee is guided in proposing changes to the music by principles that it has adopted and the respective synods have approved. Having previously explained the principles regarding changes to the format and text, I now explain those regarding changes to the music.

The principles regarding music

The principles governing our evaluation of the music of the Psalter are these:³

Music. We affirm the desire to sing excellent music in the Psalter. It is then the purpose of the committee to review the general quality of the music of the Psalter. It was noted that the Psalter should be designed for congregational (not choral) singing, while maintaining a range of simple to more complex tunes.

The general quality of the music/tunes will be considered along the following criteria:

- 1) Is the tune too difficult? Does it have too wide a range, inconsistent or difficult rhythms, awkward leaps, etc?
- 2) Is the music aesthetically pleasing? Is the melody pleasing? Is the harmony appropriate?
- 3) Is the music suited for the text to which it has been assigned?
- 4) Does the music call undue attention to itself?
- 5) Does the music or tune have inappropriate associations?
- 6) Is the music pitched too high? Would this selection sound better in another key?

Again, the general quality of the music must be considered in relation to what is already familiar, and will be revised only if the music of worship would be stronger because of these changes.

Principles 1 and 6 regard the singing of the music; principles 2, 4, and 5 regard the nature of the musical selection; and principle 3 regards the relationship of the music to the lyrics.

Principles 1 and 6

Implementing principles 1 and 6, the committee is

² PRC *Acts of Synod 2016*, Art. 49 B. 3. b. 2), 62.

³ Report of the Interdenominational Psalter Revision Committee to the Synods of 2016, PRC *Acts of Synod 2016*, 168-169.

proposing to revise or replace difficult tunes. Some tunes are not well known, possibly because they are “difficult” tunes: Psalter 180 may well be a case in point. But “difficult” tunes also include some that are well known and sung regularly, but are pitched too high, have too wide a range (for example, the lowest soprano note is a middle C and the highest is a high F), have awkward leaps (when one note is followed by a note that is about an octave or more higher than the previous), or have difficult rhythms.

Applying principle 1, the committee proposes to remove the notation to “ritard” (“slow down;” Psalter 220, for example) in most, if not all, instances. Often the music does not warrant a ritard, and if the words in one stanza do warrant slowing down, the words in the other stanzas do not necessarily call for a slower pace at the same point in the song.

Psalter 206 is an instance of a song with an awkward leap. In the soprano line, the fifth note is an A, and the next note is a middle C. (I am referring to the notes that accompany the syllables “we ren-”). In the next line of music, the third note is an A, followed by an E (“Thy won-”). Although the song was written as it currently appears in our Psalter, the downward leap from A to middle C seems unnatural, especially in light of the downward move from A to E in the next line. Often our people, perhaps without realizing it, sing the soprano middle C as an E. The committee recommends raising the soprano and alto in the first line of music to an E (soprano) and middle C (alto).

In keeping with principle 6, several tunes are being lowered a half or whole step. Many of these tunes had at least one high F in the soprano. Others, even if not having a high F, had a long sequence of notes in a high range (see the soprano notes above “mercy to me afford” in stanza one of Psalter 235). In other instances the committee judged that a different key was more fitting to the lyrics or the emotions expressed in the song.

An inevitable consequence of a lowered tune is that, if the soprano note is lowered, so are the alto, tenor, and bass notes. Before deciding to recommend lowering a key signature, the committee asks what effect this will have on these other parts.

Principles 2, 4, and 5

Implementing principles 2, 4, and 5, the committee is asking whether a tune is appropriate for congregational singing.

Because our Psalter is primarily intended for *congregational* singing, rather than singing by a *choir*, the committee desires every tune to have complete harmo-

nization for all four parts. I am not now speaking of instances in which the song combines the soprano and alto notes, or the tenor and bass notes (the tenor and bass of Psalter 45, for example). Rather, I am speaking of tunes in which one of the four parts has rests, while the others are to sing (the bass in the third system of Psalter 31, tenor and bass in the first four measures of Psalter 204, second tune; Psalters 219 and 226, and others). This is one reason why the committee is not recommending to use the second tune of Psalter 204 and the tunes to Psalter 219 and 226. It is possible, though not certain, that the committee will recommend fully harmonizing some tunes—Psalter 190, for example.

Some harmonies, although written out fully, are still not conducive to congregational singing. For this reason, the committee proposes replacing the tune to Psalter 205. Also, although the committee has not yet begun to treat Psalters 244-413, it will evaluate the tune to Psalter 254 with this in mind. The tune is popular, at least in the PRC, but its harmonization is such that it requires a trained group of singers to sing the harmony well.

Not uncommonly, before a tune was set to a Psalter arrangement, it had been set to secular music or Christmas music. The committee evaluates whether this makes the tune less appropriate for congregational singing (principle 5). Several examples can be given. The second tune of Psalter 212 is “Auld Lang Syne.” Perhaps the association of that tune with a song commonly sung in bars is not as great today as it has been in the past, but this association is one reason why the committee proposes eliminating that tune. Another tune that is recommended for replacement is “Materna” (Psalter 126), which is the tune to “America the Beautiful.” Several Psalter tunes are set to Christmas carols. Initially, the committee was inclined to replace all such tunes, but this remains a point of discussion within the committee. Without being able to tell you what the outcome will be in the various instances, I can tell you that the committee evaluates each Christmas carol tune with this in mind.

The fact that a tune is set to other words is not in itself a reason to replace the tune. But the committee asks the question whether the association that is formed in our minds by using the tune of a popular hymn or other song makes the tune preferable for our use or not.

Principle 3

Evaluating the relationship of tune to text requires a good understanding of the emotions that the psalmist conveys in the psalm, and a good sense of how music affects our moods and emotions. Some might consider

these points to be entirely subjective—what one or another thinks. Without doubt, there is a measure of subjectivity. However, those who study the psalms and who understand music can come to conclusions about these matters that are not merely subjective. And many minds are helpful at this point: even on the committee, some have a better sense of these matters than others and, after hearing the input of all, we make a decision together.

Perhaps the classic example of this is Psalter 136. “Dust to dust, the mortal dies,” we sing, as the tune has us constantly moving. In the hymn “Watchman, tell us of the night,” the tune’s movements suggest the desire that the questioner is anxious to know the matter, and perhaps that he desires the watchman to be alert, to give the answer as soon as he can. But “dust to dust, the mortal dies,” while constituting a warning to God’s people, is better sung to a tune that is more somber than that of Psalter 136.

The current tune to Psalter 205 has a lilt to it; its rhythm, as well as a wide range of jumps from lower to higher note and down again, indicates that. However, Psalm 74 is an expression of profound grief because of the judgments that God has sent on Israel. The tune and text do not match. Psalter 209 is another instance of a cry of grief on the part of the child of God. Although the tune to Psalter 209 is simpler and easier than that of Psalter 205, the tune does not inherently fit the mood of the lyrics. In some instances—Psalter 209 being one of them—the tune that is proposed for replacement is in a minor key, rather than major key, in order better to convey the emotion of the Psalm.

One more example must suffice. Although the committee did not originally know whether it would reuse the second tune to Psalter 201, we judged that this tune fit well with the lyrics of Psalter 57 (Ps. 24). The tune is triumphant; try playing it once with a clear trumpet at a lively pace, and see how that makes the tune seem different than when played slowly with a soft flute. The words of Psalter 201 are more appropriate to a tune played slowly with a soft flute; but the words of Psalter 57 are majestic. We judged that the second tune of Psalter 201 fit the words of Psalter 57 well.

Conclusion

This brings to an end my explanation of the principles that the committee is using in reviewing our Psalter and recommending changes. In future articles, the Lord willing, I will present case studies showing how the committee has applied the principles regarding text, music, and format to specific Psalter numbers.

I conclude with restating what I said when I began

these articles: my purpose has been to demonstrate that the revision committee is consciously asking the right questions and striving to find good answers to these questions. Evaluating music and poetry is inherently subjective; one likes this better, and another likes that.

It follows that deciding whether any tune or set of lyrics should be revised is also at least partly subjective. However, the committee is doing its work according to these principles in order to minimize the subjectiveness of the work.



All Thy works shall praise Thee

Dr. Nathan Lanning, cellular and molecular biologist and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Redlands, California

Moderating sugar consumption

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

I Corinthians 6:12

In order to remain alive and properly function, the cells that make up our bodies must continually take in nutrients. These nutrients provide the raw materials required for the production of hormones by endocrine cells, by digestive enzymes, by intestinal cells, by hemoglobin in red blood cells, and by the myriad of other items produced by our dozens of additional unique cell types. Nutrients also provide our cells with a critically important energy source to power all of our body's functions.

The nutrients that are converted to cellular energy come in many forms, some of which are considered 'healthier' than others. In part, it is for this reason that the nutritional contents of foods are required to be displayed on most items in the grocery store. Most of the nutritional contents that we find in the grocery store are just fine for consumption by the average healthy individual, but only in appropriate (or balanced) doses. Therefore, it is wise for us to maintain some level of awareness with respect to the nutritional content that we consume. We must eat in order to remain alive. However, our gracious God has given us the gift of being able to *enjoy* eating food. Many of the nutrients that God has seen fit to include in the creation are undeniably delicious, and we can praise Him by partaking of these nutrients with thanksgiving and to His glory.

As I write this, the holidays are rapidly approaching, and I anticipate enjoying the delightful culinary

creations associated with this time of the year. However, uninhibited consumption of holiday delicacies or "everyday" foods is not wise for two reasons: Scripture urges moderation in all things and overconsumption of certain nutrients can lead to poor health. Remarkably, the distinct physiological processes that lead to poor health from overconsumption of some nutrients have been identified. It is interesting to consider how the Creator governs these processes so that it truly does become wise to observe moderation in this context from an earthly human-health point of view.

In fact, our cells can harvest energy from many types of nutrients; however, the most common nutrients associated with providing cellular energy are carbohydrates. There are three major types of carbohydrate content in most foods available from the grocery store: *starch* (naturally found in wheat, corn, potatoes, and rice); *sucrose* (naturally found in many plants and fruits, but also refined from these sources and used as an additive sweetener); and *high fructose corn syrup* (HFCS, purely an additive sweetener). Starch is made up of long chains of the molecule glucose (hundreds to thousands of glucose molecules linked together), while sucrose is made up of only two individual molecules bonded together: glucose and fructose. HFCS is a mixture of individual glucose and fructose molecules. Our cells can only harvest energy from these carbohydrates when they are present as individual molecules; therefore, when we consume starch, enzymes in our saliva and small intestine break starch into individual glucose molecules, and enzymes in our small intestine break sucrose into individual glucose and fructose molecules. Glucose and

fructose are also naturally found as individual molecules in most fruits.

Individual glucose and fructose molecules (also called simple sugars) are absorbed into our blood from the small intestine, and then transported to our liver, which serves as our body's command center for distributing sugar through the blood stream to cells in need of energy. This function of the liver is readily accomplished with glucose, which is alternately stored in the liver or sent throughout the body when energy is required. However, the same is not true for fructose. In fact, diets high in fructose (diets high in sucrose or HFCS) pose two challenges to the liver with respect to regulating sugar levels in the body.

The first challenge is related to the amount of glucose and fructose that liver cells extract from blood as it passes through the organ. Liver cells extract a relatively small percentage of the total glucose out of the blood, allowing the majority of glucose to pass through the liver and on to the rest of the body. However, liver cells extract nearly all of the fructose from the blood as it passes through, leaving almost no fructose to be distributed to other cells and tissues. Therefore, foods high in sucrose only deliver half of the sugar molecules to "energy hungry" tissues such as brain and muscle (again, sucrose is broken into one glucose and one fructose molecule). In order to supply your muscles and brain with the same amount of energy, you would have to consume two times the amount of sucrose as starch—and you would have to consume even more than that for some HFCS foods that contain an even greater proportion of fructose compared to glucose.

This is the challenge posed by diets high in fructose: the brain receives information that a meal with high sugar content has been consumed but it does not receive much energy from that meal. Therefore, when individuals make high fructose-content food a regular and significant part of their diet, a disconnect can develop between the brain's ability to assess the amount of energy consumed and the actual amount of energy available to the entire body in their food. This is important because the brain is extremely reliant on energy from sugar and sends out signals to meet its energy needs. If the brain senses that the body is regularly consuming high sugar content but is not receiving much energy from those foods, it can raise the threshold for how much sugar content must be consumed to meet its needs. Practically, this can result in individuals desiring to eat lots of food with very high sugar content but with no associated feeling of satisfaction. This situation can adversely affect the health of these individuals due to the second challenge related to fructose and the liver.

The second challenge deals with the actual energy-harvesting process that occurs within cells. This process consists of a series of chemical reactions (metabolism) which transfer the energy in the sugar molecules into a different molecule, yielding energy in a form that cells can use. The chemical reactions of glucose metabolism include something analogous to a safety switch or circuit breaker that is triggered when energy production reaches a sufficient level. When this happens, glucose metabolism is halted and the remaining glucose is converted into the carbohydrate, glycogen, and stored or sent back out of the cell. Fructose metabolism in the liver, however, does not trigger this safety switch. Instead, fructose metabolism bypasses the safety switch and continues unceasingly to convert fructose into fat molecules in the liver. Therefore, liver cells essentially clean out all of the fructose content from food, convert it to fat, and do not make it available as energy for the rest of the body. These fat molecules can accumulate in the liver, disrupting normal liver function, and can also be distributed through the blood stream to the rest of the body, causing additional adverse effects. Recent research has shown that persistently high sugar intake levels trigger numerous other undesirable cellular reactions in addition to the production of fat molecules, leading to additional health considerations.

The rise of obesity, fatty liver disease, and metabolic disease show strong correlations with the rise of sucrose and HFCS as an additive sweetener in the Western world. Therefore, the medical and scientific communities have been intensely scrutinizing the possibility that overconsumption of fructose is a contributing factor to these diseases. While there has been healthy debate between opposing viewpoints over the years stemming from inconclusive data, the most recent studies strongly suggest that high levels of fructose in our nutritional content can and does contribute to these diseases. While fructose is a completely natural sugar, consuming it in large quantities (such as in foods and drinks containing lots of sucrose or HFCS) likely has detrimental health consequences.

Perhaps all of these physiological details are not necessary for us to follow the advice of medical associations, physicians, and health-conscious mothers on this topic: be aware of the nutritional content that we consume, and make an effort to consume balanced diets. Scriptural wisdom advising moderation (I Cor. 6:12, Gal. 5:22-23) with respect to wine (Eph. 5:18, Prov. 20:1), sleep (Prov. 23:20-21), and even honey (Prov. 25:16, 27) can certainly be applied to our general diet awareness, and our current understanding of fructose and liver physiology can also be taken into account

when making these applications. I admit that I have the proverbial “sweet tooth” and should spend more time meditating on these passages in light of these facts. The

sweetness of fructose is a good gift to us—thanks be to the Creator as we wisely use it with thanks, to the praise of His name.



News from our churches

Mr. Perry Van Egdom, member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, Iowa

Trivia question

Which Protestant Reformed minister made history on November 26, 2017? Would you like more information? Hint: it has to do with his installation. Answer later in this issue.

Congregational activities

The Edmonton congregation was invited to a night of food and fellowship, along with the Lacombe congregation, as Immanuel PRC welcomed Rev. Brian Feenstra and his family into their midst. Friday, January 12, was reserved for a potluck supper at Genesis PR Christian School, beginning at 6:30 p.m. All were requested to bring a dish to share, while beverages and dessert were provided. Following the meal there was a brief welcome program. It was an enjoyable evening of thanksgiving and praise for God’s provision for His church!

Members of the congregation at Hudsonville, MI PRC are planning to camp at Wabasis Lake in June.

The Protestant Reformed Student Orchestra presented a concert on January 25 at the St. Cecelia Music Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In many of our churches new officebearers have recently been installed. May God bless them as He has called and qualified them for their labors in His church. May the elders “Take heed that purity of doctrine and godliness of life be manifest in the church of God. And ye deacons, be diligent in collecting the alms, prudent and cheerful in the distribution of the same: assist the oppressed, provide for the true widows and orphans, show liberality unto all men, but especially to the household of faith” (PRC “Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons”).

Young people activities

The 2018 Young People’s Convention will be hosted by

the Siouxland area churches of Iowa, South Dakota, and Minnesota. Chaperone and nurse registration for 2018 Young People’s Convention began Monday January 1, 2018. The convention is planned for August 13-17 at Lake Geneva Christian Center in Alexandria, MN. To register, go to www.prcconvention.com, and follow the instructions under the chaperone or nurse tab. If you have questions, send an email to Chaperone@prcconvention.com.

The young people of Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD are hosting their 2nd Annual Pinewood Derby fundraiser on Saturday, February 24, from 11-2 in the church fellowship hall at 3800 E 15th Street, Sioux Falls. Grilled cheese sandwiches and tomato soup will be served for lunch. Spectators are welcome and a donation box will be available for those who wish to eat. A donation of \$15 will cover registration, food, and the kit to build your car. Competitors had to sign up by January 13, with the kits distributed in mid-January. Proceeds will go toward 2018 convention expenses.

Minister activities

Southwest PRC in Michigan called Candidate David Noorman to be their next pastor.

On December 31, 2017 Rev. Andy Lanning was installed as pastor in Byron Center, MI PRC, with Rev. S. Key leading the service. A welcome program followed the evening service.

Delayed by snow and ice in Michigan, the Smit family arrived two days late, but safely, in the warmth of the Philippines, on December 29.

Sister-church activities

Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church’s (Singapore) Camp will be held at Bayou Lagoon Park Resort, Melaka (<http://www.bayoulagoon.com.my>). The theme will be “Holiness: Not a Condition but a Necessity”

taken from I Peter 1:16. The speaker will be Rev. A. den Hartog. For more information, email the address of smahtani@singnet.com.sg. All campers will be required to bear their own costs for the camp.

The Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland held its congregational dinner recently at Ross Park Hotel.

Denominational activities

Hudsonville, MI PRC hosted the January 9 Classis East officebearer's conference, with Prof. B. Gritters speaking on the topic of family visitation. After explaining the important principles of family visitation, Prof. Gritters addressed and answered various practical questions concerning this beloved practice. At the end of the speech there was time for questions and discussion. All officebearers and church members were invited.

Classis East met January 10 at Hudsonville, MI PRC. The body will reconvene on February 28 to deal with an appeal put in the hands of a special committee.

School activities

Faith Christian School in Randolph, WI planned their annual "Across the Border" Supper for February 9.

Trivia answer

On November 26, 2017 Rev. Richard J. Smit became the first Protestant Reformed minister (to our knowledge) to be installed three times in the same congregation. Rev. Smit has been installed three times in the PRC at Doon, Iowa. The first time was September 9, 1996 as a seminary graduate in his first charge. The second time was March 19, 2009, when he accepted the call to be missionary to the Philippines with Doon as the calling church. The third time was recently on November 26, 2017, as Rev. Smit again accepted Doon's call to be missionary. Maybe you knew all that. Thanks to an interested reader for helping with the question. If you have interesting PRC trivia questions or news, you may send them to the Church News editor via email found in the front of each issue. More trivia next time.

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" Ecclesiastes 3:3.

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Hope PRC in Walker express their Christian sympathy to Deacon Rich DeMeester and his wife, Nelle, and children in the death of their father (-in-law) and grandfather, **Mr. Doug Bishop**. May they be comforted in the words of Jesus Christ "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26).

Rev. D. Overway, President
Joel Minderhoud, Clerk

Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Loveland PRC on Wednesday, March 7, 2018, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk by February 5 (30 days before Classis convenes). All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Loveland's consistory.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, Stated Clerk

Teacher needed

Hope PRC School in Grand Rapids, Michigan is seeking Protestant Reformed applicants to fill a lower elementary teaching position for the 2018-2019 school year. Please contact Ron Koole, school administrator (rkoole@hopeprcschool.org or 616-453-9717) if interested.

Teachers needed

Adams Christian School, a K-8 school located in Wyoming, MI, is in need of teachers for the 2018-2019 school year. We encourage all interested individuals to contact Rick Mingerink, school administrator (rickmingerink@gmail.com) (616-531-0748) for more information.

Announcements continued

Walking in the Way of Love

A Practical Commentary on 1 Corinthians for the Believer

In this epistle the apostle explains the way of love. The whole book is an exposition of the way of love. In the entire book the Holy Ghost calls the church to walk in the way of love as that way is carefully laid out and applied in many different situations. The way of love is "a more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31). Apart from walking in that way of love, the church is carnal and begins to disintegrate.

Written by new author Nathan J. Langerak. Rev. Langerak is a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. He lives in Crete, Illinois, with his wife, Carrie, and six children. He has served as pastor of Crete Protestant Reformed Church since 2007.



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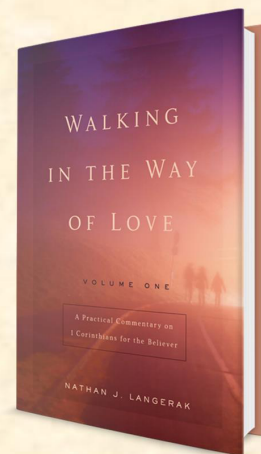
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Seminary

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Bill VanOverloop. (Phone: 616 669-1504.) This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, March 6, 2018, 4 p.m., D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Bill VanOverloop, Secretary

Reformed Witness Hour

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Feb. 4 "God Chastens an Unfaithful Family"

Ruth 1:1-6

Feb. 11 "The Conversion of Ruth"

Ruth 1:7-18

Feb. 18 "The Homecoming of Naomi"

Ruth 1:19-22

Feb. 25 "The First Meeting of Boaz and Ruth"

Ruth 2:1-17

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